

AÑO NUEVO STATE PARK DRAFT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Park Description

Año Nuevo State Reserve and Año Nuevo State Park are located in San Mateo County, approximately 25 miles south of Half Moon Bay and 25 miles north of Santa Cruz. These parks are in the Santa Cruz Mountains region and are within 65 miles of the major metropolitan centers of San Jose, San Francisco and Oakland. State Highway 1 provides primary public access to both park units.

These state park and state reserve lands protect environmentally diverse segments of California's central coast. The State Reserve, on the coastal side of Highway 1, consists of approximately 1,300 acres of marine terrace, sandy dunes and beaches, rocky coastline, and Año Nuevo Island. The State Reserve is the site of a major mainland breeding colony of the northern elephant seal, with a popular interpretive program and tours part of which is managed as a Wildlife Protection Area. The State Park consists of approximately 2,900 acres on the inland side of Highway 1 and is not yet developed for public use. The park is a part of the western slope of the Santa Cruz Mountains and contains uplands characterized by second-growth redwood forest together with conifers, oaks, and chaparral on rugged terrain, with mountain streams flowing through canyons on their way to the sea. These units also contain significant cultural resources that include historic ranch complexes, a coastal light station, and a native California Indian village site.

Purpose for the General Plan

Although Año Nuevo SR was included in the 1979 general plan for San Mateo coast park units, there has not been a comprehensive planning examination of both state reserve and state park lands regarding the incremental growth in size of the park, diversity of resources, recreation needs and opportunities, operational efficiencies, and connectivity with surrounding open space lands. The inland acquisition of Cascade Ranch was classified and named Año Nuevo State Park in 1985 in order to allow for consideration of recreation opportunities and park development, such as camping, which would not have been allowed if it was an addition to the existing State Reserve. Recognition of these and other issues prompted the preparation of this general plan, which provides a long-term management approach and a planning framework for these two units. One result of this planning process is the recommendation that Año Nuevo State Park and State Reserve be combined into a single state park unit as presented by this general plan.

Regional Planning Context

This plan was developed by California State Parks as part of a regional planning effort, along with general plans for Big Basin Redwoods State Park and Butano State Park. These four parks not only are in close proximity to each other; they share natural, cultural, and visitor demographic characteristics, and face similar issues. The regional characteristics and common issues were researched at the beginning of the planning process and are used as a foundation for the three resulting park plans. The General Plan process also recognized each park's unique assets and needs separately. The three plans recognize the close relationship between California State Park units and other nearby public lands, and emphasize the potential for regional collaboration in resource management, recreational use, education and interpretation, and park management.

For each plan, park issues and opportunities were identified, and goals and guidelines developed as part of this regional planning approach. Planning zones were created for each park to assist in shaping appropriate management strategies and projected levels of visitor use. Six planning zones were developed for Año Nuevo State Park. The six Año Nuevo SP planning zones are described in the matrix at the end of this Executive Summary.

Key Issues and Opportunities

The following are the primary planning issues addressed by the General Plan:

- Combining Año Nuevo State Park and Año Nuevo State Reserve into a single state park: The amount of land in state park ownership has grown in the Año Nuevo vicinity as acquisition opportunities have occurred over the past 49 years since the original state reserve acquisition. The amount and diversity of natural, cultural, and scenic resources on state park lands has expanded significantly beyond the elephant seals and coastal habitats of the original park acquisition. Although the elephant seal tours are among State Park System's most popular natural resource attractions, visitors do not fully recognize the broad range of the park's resources, available lands, and connections to regional trail networks. Furthermore, the potential recreation and interpretation opportunities that would provide visitor awareness and appreciation of these resources have not been fully explored or realized. Park development, operations and maintenance have also evolved in an incremental manner to respond to specific management circumstances and issues as the state park land ownership has grown. Combining the State Reserve and the State Park would support expanded visitor experiences and orientation with a broader regional perspective toward visitor recreation opportunities and collaborative open space management. The coastal dune habitat and wildlife will be protected and managed in a designated Natural Preserve. The consolidation under one unit name would emphasize the historic links in ownership between the properties and avoid visitor confusion when trying to locate or contact the park. The consolidation would also

improve park operations, resource management and protection, and future public access and visitor needs.

- Recreation Demand and Visitor Opportunities: The proximity of Año Nuevo State Park to the nearby high density urban centers of Santa Clara Valley and the Bay Area can help serve a high regional demand for recreation. There is potential for enhancing and diversifying current recreation activities along the coast, as well as providing new recreation opportunities in the inland portions of Año Nuevo State Park where formal park access and facilities have not been established. Links and partnerships between Año Nuevo and other surrounding regional open space areas will play an important role in providing even more diversified and accessible recreational activities as well as recreation opportunities for a large nearby urban population.
- Public Access and Circulation: Existing access and circulation has increased as ownership and visitor use have evolved. Improving access to and within the consolidated park units and enhancing regional connections was a significant aspect of this planning effort. This General Plan's proposal to combine the State Reserve and State Park units provides an opportunity to improve and coordinate circulation and visitor safety, as well as assure integration with regional open space access and trail networks.
- Regional Planning Approach: Año Nuevo State Park is surrounded by several State Park System units as well as other open space, recreational, and historic properties, such as Cloverdale Coastal Ranches, Coast Dairies, and Cascade Ranch Historic Farm. The close proximity of these properties and the similarity of natural, cultural, recreational, and interpretive resources provide opportunities to manage these lands in a coordinated and integrated way. This general plan emphasizes and supports the regional open space recreation, natural, and cultural values of the parks and surrounding public lands.
- Preservation of Environmentally Sensitive Areas: There are significant environmentally sensitive areas with individual and distinctive landscape character and experiences that warrant special protection and management. In recognition and response to these special park features, this general plan establishes a Natural Preserve to preserve and protect coastal habitats and wildlife. The General Plan also establishes a Cultural Preserve to preserve and protect a culturally significant valley in the inland portion of the park.

Key Proposals and Planning Concepts

The General Plan merges the two existing park units into one single multi-faceted park. The General Plan highlights the abundant diversity of park features and central California coastal visitor experiences beyond the popularity of the elephant seal tours at Año Nuevo Point. The General Plan improves and expands protection of park resources; provides park improvements that enhance current and future coastal visitor use; establishes new visitor access and

recreation opportunities to the park's inland areas; and provides for improved park operations and management. New Natural Preserve and Cultural Preserve sub-classification designations provide increased protection for special areas of the park. Key General Plan concepts and proposals include:

Plan Concepts

- Integrate the planning, preservation, visitor opportunities, interpretation, park management, and operation of Año Nuevo State Reserve and Año Nuevo State Park into one unified and multi-faceted park unit.
- Collaborate with area partners on Santa Cruz Mountains-San Mateo Coast regional open space management, sensitive resource protection and habitat linkages, recreation, trail networks, and education and interpretation. Explore acquisitions for these same purposes as land becomes available.
- In response to California's demographic trends, where possible provide group picnic and camping facilities, indoor overnight accommodations such as cabins or yurts, RV campsites, and ADA-compliant recreational facilities.
- Preserve the wild, natural, and rural character of the Año Nuevo coast and the Santa Cruz Mountains backcountry.
- Locate the majority of park improvements and new development at the existing ranch complexes and along/near the State Highway 1 corridor which is the primary access route to the park. Reduce park development as the distance from the ranch complexes and highway increases.
- Incorporate sustainable design principles into the design, development, operations, and maintenance of park facilities and programs.
- Improve park circulation and access for vehicles, pedestrians, equestrians, and bicycles. Work with local transit agencies to expand park access via mass-transit and multi-modal transportation systems.
- Minimize sensitive resource impacts while expanding recreation opportunities.

Plan Proposals

- Reclassify Año Nuevo SR and Año Nuevo SP into a single State Park unit.
- Replace the existing Wildlife Protection Area (434 acres). Designate a Natural Preserve sub-classification (800 acres) and expand protection of coastal wildlife, habitats, and park resources
- Establish a Cultural Preserve (225 acres) in the Quiroste Valley to preserve and protect the unique cultural resources, landscape setting, and native California Indian heritage.
- Preserve and maintain the historic character of the Dickerman-Steele Ranch and Cascade Ranch complexes. Allow for appropriate adaptive uses.
- Continue the Dickerman-Steele Ranch complex as the park's primary visitor orientation, interpretation, and activity center.
- Improve and expand park visitor facilities, experiences, access, and trails
- Develop day use parking and trailhead facilities at Lake Elizabeth to establish visitor access into the inland areas and the Santa Cruz Mountains open space region.
- Provide new trailhead access and potential day uses facilities and/or an operations maintenance facility south of the Cascade Ranch

- Connect State Park lands to regional trail systems and destinations, including the California Coastal Trail.
- Continue to survey for sensitive plant and animal species, and implement appropriate management techniques to protect those species.
- Provide greater cultural resource protection and interpretation at Quiroste Valley.
- Improve park services and operations efficiency through interagency and intra-district cooperation and sharing of personnel and resources. This may include operations facilities in the vicinity of Cascade Ranch.
- Provide trailside camping and alternative overnight visitor opportunities such as enroute camping and indoor overnight accommodations such as yurts in the inland areas of the park where appropriate
- Continue wildlife research activities at Año Nuevo Island
- Work with federal, state, and local agencies to provide effective and efficient regional natural resource management.

Management Plans

Some of the goals and guidelines comprising the Park Plan (Chapter 4) direct the preparation of specific management plans and more detailed site investigations. These include the following:

- Wildfire Management Plan
- Watershed Management Plan
- Roads and Trails Management Plan
- Scope of Collections Statement
- Interpretive Plans and Exhibit Plans

Preparation and implementation of these management plans may be required in support of facilities development and before certain management actions can take place. Additional management plans may also be prepared when determined to be necessary by the Department.

Tiered CEQA Environmental Analysis

This General Plan/Final EIR serves as a first-tier Environmental Impact Report, as defined in Section 15166 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. The environmental analysis is programmatic in scope and serves as a first tier EIR. Tiering is a process where a lead agency prepares a series of environmental documents, progressing from general concerns to more site-specific evaluations with the preparation of each new document (CEQA Guidelines Section 15152). The Environmental Analysis does not contain project-specific analysis for the facilities that are considered in the General Plan but analyzes broad environmental matters and is a reference for future environmental documents that will provide more detailed information and analysis for site specific developments and projects.

This General Plan/Final EIR provides discussion of the probable impacts of future development and established goals, policies, and objectives to implementing such development in a manner which will avoid or minimize such environmental impacts. This approach is consistent with a tiered approach to EIRs.

The General Plan also includes guidelines that govern future project-level environmental review of site-specific projects to avoid or minimize potential adverse site-specific effects to resources during construction or operation of the facilities and improvements. Specific projects would also undergo subsequent CEQA review as appropriate. Because the General Plan contains goals and guidelines that are designed to avoid or minimize potential adverse environmental effects, no significant program-level impacts were identified.